



COVID cases are falling, but U.S. on the brink of 700,000 dead

By AMY FORLITI and CARLA K. JOHNSON

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A decline in COVID-19 cases across the United States over the past several weeks has given overwhelmed hospitals some relief, but administrators are bracing for yet another possible surge as cold weather drives people indoors. Health experts say the fourth wave of the pandemic has peaked overall in the U.S., particularly in the Deep South, where hospitals were stretched to the limit weeks ago. But many Northern states are still struggling with rising cases, and what's ahead for winter is far less clear.

Unknowns include how flu season may strain already depleted hospital staffs and whether those who have refused to get vaccinated will change their minds.

An estimated 70 million eligible Americans remain unvaccinated, providing kindling for the highly contagious delta variant.

"If you're not vaccinated or have protection from natural infection, this virus will find you," warned Mike



In this Aug. 17, 2021, file photo, nursing coordinator Beth Springer looks into a patient's room in a COVID-19 ward at the Willis-Knighton Medical Center in Shreveport, La.

Associated Press

Osterholm, director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.

Nationwide, the number of people now in the hospital with COVID-19 has fallen to somewhere around 75,000

from over 93,000 in early September. New cases are on the downswing at about 112,000 per day on

average, a drop of about one-third over the past 2 1/2 weeks.

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SUNDAY:	MONDAY:	TUESDAY:	WEDNESDAY:	THURSDAY:	FRIDAY:	SATURDAY:
TICO KOCK STEEL DRUM 4 - 6pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	PAULA RIDERSTAP SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm	RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm
PAULA RIDERSTAP SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	Happy Hour 12 - 1 / 4 - 6 / 9 - 10		KARAOKE HAPPY HOUR 9:00 - 11:00pm			

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Continued from Front

Deaths, too, appear to be declining, averaging about 1,900 a day versus more than 2,000 about a week ago, though the U.S. closed in Friday on the heartbreaking milestone of 700,000 dead overall since the pandemic began.

The easing of the summer surge has been attributed to more mask wearing and more people getting vaccinated. The decrease in case numbers could also be due to the virus having burned through susceptible people and running out of fuel in some places.

In another promising development, Merck said Friday its experimental pill for people sick with COVID-19 reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half. If it wins authorization from regulators, it will be the first pill for treating COVID-19 — and an important, easy-to-use new weapon in the arsenal against the pandemic.

All treatments now authorized in the U.S. against the coronavirus require an IV or injection.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease specialist, warned on Friday that some may see the encouraging trends as a reason to remain unvaccinated.

"It's good news we're starting to see the curves" coming down, he said. "That is not an excuse to walk away from the issue of needing to get vaccinated."

Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, began seeing a surge of COVID-19 hospitalizations



In this Aug. 28, 2021, file photo, registered nurse, Noleen Nobleza, center, inoculates Julio Quiñones with a COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic set up in the parking lot of CalOptima in Orange, Calif. Associated Press

in mid-July, and by the first week of August, the place was beyond capacity. It stopped elective surgeries and brought in military doctors and nurses to help care for patients.

With cases now down, the military team is scheduled to leave at the end of October.

Still, the hospital's chief medical officer, Dr. Catherine O'Neal, said the rate of hospitalizations isn't decreasing as quickly as cases in the community because the delta variant is affecting more young people who are otherwise healthy and are living much longer in the intensive care unit on ventilators.

"It creates a lot of ICU patients that don't move anywhere," she said. And many of the patients aren't going home at all. In the last few

weeks, the hospital saw several days with more than five COVID-19 deaths daily, including one day when there were 10 deaths.

"We lost another dad in his 40s just a few days ago," O'Neal said. "It's continuing to happen. And that's what the tragedy of COVID is."

As for where the outbreak goes from here, "I have to tell you, my crystal ball has broken multiple times in the last two years," she said. But she added that the hospital has to be prepared for another surge at the end of November, as flu season also ramps up.

Dr. Sandra Kemmerly, system medical director for hospital quality at Ochsner Health in Louisiana, said this fourth surge of the pandemic has been harder. "It's just frustrating for people to die of vaccine-pre-

ventable illnesses," she said. At the peak of this most recent wave, Ochsner hospitals had 1,074 COVID-19 patients on Aug. 9. That had dropped to 208 as of Thursday.

Other hospitals are seeing decreases as well. The University of Mississippi Medical Center had 146 hospitalized COVID-19 patients at its mid-August peak. That was down to 39 on Friday. Lexington Medical Center in West Columbia, South Carolina, had more than 190 in early September but just 49 on Friday.

But Kemmerly doesn't expect the decrease to last. "I fully expect to see more hospitalizations due to COVID," she said.

Like many other health professionals, Natalie Dean, a professor of biostatistics at Emory University, is taking

a cautious view about the winter.

It is unclear if the coronavirus will take on the seasonal pattern of the flu, with predictable peaks in the winter as people gather indoors for the holidays. Simply because of the nation's size and diversity, there will be places that have outbreaks and surges, she said.

What's more, the uncertainties of human behavior complicate the picture. People react to risk by taking precautions, which slows viral transmission. Then, feeling safer, people mingle more freely, sparking a new wave of contagion. "Infectious disease models are different from weather models," Dean said. "A hurricane doesn't change its course because of what the model said."

One influential model, from the University of Washington, projects new cases will bump up again this fall, but vaccine protection and infection-induced immunity will prevent the virus from taking as many lives as it did last winter.

Still, the model predicts about 90,000 more Americans will die by Jan. 1 for an overall death toll of 788,000 by that date. The model calculates that about half of those deaths could be averted if almost everyone wore masks in public.

"Mask wearing is already heading in the wrong direction," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the university. "We need to make sure we are ready for winter because our hospitals are exhausted." □



In this Tuesday, May 25, 2021 file photo, travelers watch a JetBlue Airways aircraft taxi away from a gate at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Va. Associated Press

White House presses airlines to get employees vaccinated

AP Airlines Writer

Alaska Airlines and JetBlue are joining United Airlines in requiring employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, just as the Biden administration steps up pressure on major U.S. carriers to require the shots.

White House coronavirus adviser Jeffrey Zients talked to the CEOs of American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Southwest Airlines about vaccine mandates, ac-

cording to three people familiar with the situation. They spoke Friday on condition of anonymity because the calls were private.

Airlines are large employers that fall under President Joe Biden's sweeping order that companies with more than 100 workers require employees to be vaccinated or undergo weekly testing for the virus.

They are also government contractors, and so could

fall under a Dec. 8 deadline that contractors enforce vaccination requirements — without the testing option. Delta said it was still evaluating Biden's order. The airline previously said it will require vaccination or weekly testing and impose surcharges on unvaccinated employees. That would meet the Biden test for large employers but not the stricter rules for federal contractors. □

Judge questions whether Jan. 6 rioters are treated unfairly

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rejecting the recommendation of prosecutors, a federal judge sentenced a Jan. 6 rioter to probation on Friday and suggested that the Justice Department was being too hard on those who broke into the Capitol compared to the people arrested during anti-racism protests following George Floyd's murder. U.S. District Court Judge Trevor McFadden questioned why federal prosecutors had not brought more cases against those accused in 2020 summer-time protests, reading out statistics on riot cases in the nation's capital that were not prosecuted.

"I think the U.S. attorney would have more credibility if it was even-handed in its concern about riots and mobs in this city," McFadden said during Danielle Doyle's sentencing for entering the Capitol on Jan. 6 with a throng of other rioters. Prosecutors recommended two months of home confinement for Doyle, who is from Oklahoma.

The statements by McFadden, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, were a major departure from the other



In this Jan. 6, 2021 file photo, violent insurrectionists loyal to President Donald Trump scale the west wall of the the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

Associated Press

federal judges overseeing insurrection cases so far, despite other Trump appointees on the court assigned to the hundreds of cases. They have generally discussed seriousness of the crime and its unique place in American history - different from other violent free speech protests because it sought to disrupt the peaceful transition of power.

The Associated Press analyzed more than 300 criminal cases stemming from the protests incited

by Floyd's murder, showing that many leftist rioters had received substantial sentences, rebutting the argument that pro-Trump defendants were treated more harshly than Black Lives Matter protesters.

As McFadden sentenced Doyle, he said he thought she was "acting like all those looters and rioters last year. That's because looters and rioters decided the law did not apply to them." Despite these concerns, McFadden said Doyle's behavior was not excusable.

He called it a "national embarrassment," and again likened it to the police brutality protests following the death of George Floyd last year that made "us all feel less safe."

By contrast, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg on Friday sentenced another rioter, Andrew Ryan Bennett, to three months of home confinement, accepting the request by prosecutors. Bennett was accused of espousing conspiracy theories about the election and used "pug-

nacious rhetoric" in posting about his plans to be in Washington. The mob on Jan. 6 attacked and beat an overwhelmed police force, sent lawmakers running for their lives and did more than \$1 million in damage to the building.

"I can't emphasize enough, as I've said before, that the cornerstone of our democratic republic is the peaceful transfer of power after an election," the judge told Bennett. "And what you and others did on Jan. 6 was nothing less than an attempt to undermine that system of government."

Earlier this week, Boasberg, appointed by former President Barack Obama, sentenced Derek Jancart and Erik Rau, friends from Ohio, to 45 days in jail.

All three men had pleaded guilty to misdemeanors punishable by a maximum of six months' imprisonment. Like Jancart and Rau, Bennett wasn't accused of personally engaging in violence or property destruction.

Bennett said he was not thinking clearly and was "pumped up on adrenaline" when he joined the mob that stormed the Capitol after driving to Washington from his home in Columbia, Maryland, that morning. □

Former President Jimmy Carter quietly marks 97th birthday

PLAINS, Ga. (AP) — Ex-President Jimmy Carter, the oldest former U.S. chief executive ever, will quietly mark his 97th birthday at home in southwest Georgia on Friday, an aide said.

Slowed by age in recent years and keeping a low profile during the coronavirus pandemic, Carter doesn't plan on any public appearances, said press secretary Deanna Congelio at the Carter Center in Atlanta.

Workers at the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site in tiny Plains recorded greetings for the former president, and members of the public can sign an online birthday card at www.cartercenter.org. Dozens sent early birth-

day greetings, and many didn't even mention Carter's Democratic presidency from 1977-81. Instead, they said they were inspired by Carter's post-presidential life that has included volunteer work, authorship of multiple books, advocacy for justice and years of teaching Sunday school.

"We love you for your honesty, consistency and for being so articulate," said one message. Many shared photos of themselves with Carter and his wife Rosalynn, who celebrated 75 years of marriage in July.

The former president was diagnosed with melanoma that had spread to his liver and brain in 2015 but underwent treatment and

announced he was cancer-free four months later. He has had a string of falls, including one that left him with a broken pelvis in October 2019, and has used a walker when in public most recently.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden visited the Carters at their home in April. "We sat and talked about the old days," Biden said of his predecessor.

A quiet birthday could be all the more somber as the family prepares for the funeral of Carter's daughter-in-law Annette Davis Carter, the longtime wife of Jeff Carter, in Plains on Saturday. She died earlier this month at the age of 68.

Annette Carter's service



In this Nov. 3, 2019, file photo, former President Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga.

Associated Press

will be held at Maranatha Baptist Church, which the ex-president helped found

and where the pastor regularly asks members to pray for the Carters. □

Alabama lawmakers OK plan to build prisons with virus cash

By KIM CHANDLER

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP)

— Amid a national debate over the use of pandemic relief funds, Alabama lawmakers swiftly approved a plan Friday to tap \$400 million from the American Rescue Plan to help build two super-size prisons, brushing off criticism from congressional Democrats that the money was not intended for such projects.

In a bipartisan vote that brought few dissents, the Alabama Senate voted 29-2 to approve the \$1.3 billion prison construction plan, and 30-1 to steer \$400 million of the state's \$2.1 billion from the rescue funds to pay for it.

With legislative leaders standing behind her, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey signed the bills into law. The Republican called the construction plan "a major step forward" for the prison system that faces federal court orders and a lawsuit by the U.S. Department of Justice.

"This is a pivotal moment for the trajectory of our state's criminal justice system," Ivey said.

Republican Sen. Greg Albritton said state officials are confident they can legally use the pandemic



People protest the prison plan outside the Alabama State House in Montgomery, Ala., on Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021.

funds, and said the construction to replace many existing prisons will "go a long way" to addressing the state's longstanding problems in prisons.

"This was the right thing for Alabama to do. We've got crumbling infrastructure. We've got people housed in places that are filthy. We've got individuals in working in conditions that are unsafe," Albritton said. President Joe Biden's sweeping \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 rescue package was

signed in March, providing a stream of funds to states and cities to recover from the pandemic. Alabama's plan prompted sharp criticism from some congressional Democrats who said prison construction was not the intent of the relief bill. Republicans said the rules give them discretion to spend the money on what they see as their greatest need.

The U.S. Department of Justice has sued Alabama over a prison system "rid-

dled with prisoner-on-prisoner and guard-on-prisoner violence." The Justice Department noted in an earlier report that dilapidated facilities were a contributing factor to the unconstitutional conditions but noted "new facilities alone will not resolve" the matter because of problems in culture, management deficiencies, corruption, violence and other problems. Democratic Sen. Billy Beasley, the only senator to vote against the measure, had

opposed the bills and expressed concern that correctional facilities in his district could close under the plan, striking an economic blow to his rural district. He and several Democrats urged the state to quickly allocate the remaining \$1.7 billion in American Rescue Plan funds to health care and other needs.

"The hospitals in Alabama have really been under tremendous pressure. ... We need to do more out of the rescue money to help the hospitals in the state of Alabama," Beasley said.

U.S. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York this week sent a letter to Treasury Department Secretary Janet Yellen asking Treasury to "prevent the misuse of (American Rescue Plan) funding by any state, including Alabama" to build prisons.

Ivey fired back her own letter, writing, "The Democrat-controlled federal government has never had an issue with throwing trillions of dollars toward their ideological pet projects."

Asked Wednesday about Alabama's plan, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said, "I would be surprised if that was the intention of the funding." □

Associated Press

Police: Houston school employee shot by ex-student on campus



Yes Prep Southwest Secondary school 8th grader Kimberly Mendez, 14, rushes to embrace her father Rudis and sister Ashley, 16, 11th grade, at a parking lot after an alleged shooting took place at her school, YES Prep Southwest Secondary school, on Friday, Oct. 1, 2021, in Houston.

Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A former student of a Houston charter school shot and wounded a school employee on

campus Friday morning before quickly surrendering to police, authorities said. The man shot through a

locked, glass door at YES Prep Southwest Secondary, then shot the employee in the back, Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said.

The employee was in serious condition at a hospital, Finner said. No students were hurt, the school said in a statement.

Police did not release the name of the wounded employee or the shooter but said they were able to quickly identify him because he was a former student. Police also did not release a motive, but Finner said authorities were investigating whether the shooter and wounded man had any past interactions.

The shooting happened at about 11:45 a.m. YES Prep Southwest Secondary is a

charter school that serves students in sixth through 12th grades.

A line of students in masks streamed out of the school just before 1 p.m., holding their hands up to show officers they were not carrying a weapon. Multiple students told reporters in Spanish and English what they witnessed. Some said they saw blood while leaving the building, and others said they hid and blocked doorways with furniture like they had practiced in drills to survive a shooting. Parents could be seen having tearful reunions as they met their children in a parking lot near the school.

"You don't want anything like this to happen," Finner said, "but I want to com-

mend those students. Every student I've seen coming out, they were calm. The administrators, the teachers, outstanding job. I want to commend them. ... They train for it."

The shooting Friday happened about 30 miles (50 kilometers) from the site of one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history. A then-17-year-old armed with a shotgun and a pistol opened fire at Santa Fe High school in May 2018, killing 10 people, most of whom were students. The suspect has been receiving mental health treatment at a state hospital since December 2019. Doctors say he remains incompetent to stand trial on state capital murder charges. □

Georgia's ex-president arrested after returning home

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Former President Mikheil Saakashvili was arrested after returning to Georgia, the government said Friday, a move that came as the ex-leader sought to mobilize supporters ahead of national municipal elections seen as critical to the country's political makeup.

The announcement by Prime Minister Irakli Gari-bashvili came about 18 hours after Saakashvili, who was convicted in absentia on abuse of power charges and has lived in Ukraine in recent years, posted on Facebook that he was back in the country.

Details of the arrest were not immediately clear, but Georgian TV on Friday evening broadcast video of Saakashvili in handcuffs, with a wide smile on his face, being taken into custody by police.

In earlier Facebook video, Saakashvili said he was in Batumi, the Black Sea port and resort that is Georgia's second-largest city. Georgian officials earlier in the day had denied he was in



In this handout photo taken from video released by Georgian Interior Ministry Press Service, Georgian Police officers escort former President Mikheil Saakashvili after he was arrested in Rustavi, Georgia, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021.

Associated Press

the country.

In the posts, Saakashvili called said Saturday's elections "crucial" for Georgia and had called for a rally in Tbilisi on Sunday, promising

to join it.

Saakashvili's attempts to rally Georgians could up-end the ruling party's plans to secure dominance in the balloting for mayors

and local assemblies that is widely regarded as a vote of confidence in the national government and could trigger early elections next year.

The European Union brokered a deal in April to ease a political crisis between the ruling Georgian Dream party and opposition groups, including Saakashvili's United National Movement, the second-biggest political force in the country.

The agreement stipulated that snap parliamentary elections should be called in 2022 if Georgian Dream receives less than 43% of all proportional votes in the local elections in the country's 64 municipalities.

It is unclear whether the EU deal will be followed, however. In July, Georgian Dream withdrew from the agreement because United National Movement hadn't signed onto it by then. The opposition party finally signed this month, and Saakashvili has urged supporters to turn out in force at the polls.

Saakashvili's intense grin in police custody underlined his penchant for public drama, particularly his bold entrances into unwelcoming places. □

U.S. official in Haiti apologizes for treatment of migrants

By EVENS SANON

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)

— A top U.S. official on Friday apologized for how Haitian migrants were treated along the U.S.-Mexico border, saying it's not how border officials or the Department of Homeland Security behave.

The comments from Juan Gonzalez, the U.S. National Security Council's senior director for the Western Hemisphere, came during a two-day official visit to Haiti to talk with local leaders about migration and other issues.

"I want to say that it was an injustice, that it was wrong," he said. "The proud people of Haiti and any migrant deserve to be treated with dignity."

The U.S. government recently came under fire for its treatment of Haitian migrants, with images showing men on horseback,

corralling Haitian asylum seekers.

Gonzalez was visiting with Brian Nichols, U.S. assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs, amid ongoing expulsions of Haitians from the U.S. to their homeland. Since Sept. 19, the U.S. has expelled some 4,600 Haitian migrants from Del Rio, Texas on 43 flights, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Gonzalez said the gathering of migrants along the border is a public health emergency and warned those who are thinking of leaving not to risk their lives.

"The danger is too great," he said.

Gonzalez and Nichols previously met with Haitian Americans and Cuban Americans in Miami on Wednesday and with Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry, members of the civil

society and political leaders in Haiti on Thursday to talk about migration, public safety, the pandemic and efforts to help those affected by the 7.2-magnitude earthquake that struck the country's southern region in mid-August. Nichols said that during their visit, they heard many people talk about the challenges that Haiti faces, noting that there's a "surprising" amount of agreement on potential solutions.

"There is no solution that will work for Haiti and its people that will be imposed from the outside," he said, referring to recent criticism about the involvement of the U.S. and other countries in Haitian affairs as it tries to recover from the earthquake and from the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse at his private home amid a spike in gang violence.



Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols and U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Michele Sison, arrive for a press conference at the U.S. Embassy, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021.

Associated Press

"However, we in the United States are committed to providing the Haitian people the support they need to succeed and implement their own vision." Nichols said the conversation with the prime minister was constructive, adding that the U.S. is encourag-

ing consensus and a holistic vision.

"The future of Haiti depends on its own people," he said. "The United States is committed to working with the people of Haiti to support as they work to bring prosperity and security back to their country." □

Venezuela introduces new currency with 6 fewer zeros

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— A new currency with six fewer zeros debuted Friday in Venezuela, whose currency has been made nearly worthless by years of the world's worst inflation. But the new bills were nowhere to be found in the capital, where consumers' fears that prices will continue to spiral upward proved to be right.

"Today, I went to the supermarket and everything was marked in dollars," Lourdes Pórtelo, an office worker, said in a shopping center in the east side of Caracas. "In the end, I couldn't buy anything, I didn't have enough money."

Before the adjustment, the highest denomination was a 1 million bolivar bill that was worth a little less than a quarter as of Thursday. The new currency tops out at 100 bolivars, a little less than \$25 — until inflation starts to eat away at that as well. The million-to-1 change for the bolivar is intended to ease both cash transactions and bookkeeping calculations in bolivars that now require juggling almost



A man shows a new 10 Bolivar bank note after withdrawing it from a cash machine in Caracas, Venezuela, Friday, Oct 1, 2021.

endless strings of zeros.

"The most important and fundamental reason is that the payment systems are already collapsed because the number of digits make the payment systems and doing the math practically unmanageable," said Jose Guerra, an economics professor at the Central Uni-

versity of Venezuela. "These debit card payment processing systems or an accounting system for companies... are not intended for hyperinflation, but for a normal economy."

Under the old system, a two-liter bottle of soda pop could cost more than 8 million bolivars — and many

of those bills were scarce, so a customer might have to pay with a thick wad of paper.

Banks allowed customers to withdraw a maximum of 20 million bolivars in cash per day, or sometimes less if the branch was running short.

So, consumers have come

to rely on U.S. dollars and digital payment methods, such as Zelle and PayPal, to make purchases. Nowadays, most transactions are made electronically, and Guerra said, more than 60% are made in U.S. dollars.

When Venezuela's Central Bank announced the currency change last month, officials said payment systems will be modernized to expand digital use of the bolivar.

They also underscored that the elimination of six zeros doesn't otherwise affect the value of the currency. The bolivar "will not be worth more or less; it is only to facilitate its use on a simpler monetary scale," according to a Central Bank statement.

But currency exchange differences confirmed people's fears that prices would go up when the currency change occurred.

The price of the dollar on the black market rose Friday by more than 500,000 bolivars and stood at 5,200,000 in the previous denomination and 5.2 bolivars per dollar in the new currency. □

Associated Press

Australian state leader quits over corruption investigation



New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian announces her resignation in Sydney, Friday, Oct. 1, 2021.

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP)

— The leader of Australia's most populous state quit Friday after an anti-corruption watchdog revealed it was investigating her over a secret relationship with a former lawmaker.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said that standing aside while the

Independent Commission Against Corruption investigated her would distract her government at a critical stage of Sydney's COVID-19 outbreak.

Numbers of COVID-19 patients in Sydney hospitals are expected to peak during October as vaccination rates rise across the state

and the city emerges from a lockdown that began in late June.

"My resignation as premier could not have occurred at a worse time, but the timing is completely outside of my control as the ICAC has chosen to take this action during the most challenging weeks of the most challenging times in the state's history. That is the ICAC's prerogative," Berejiklian told reporters.

"Resigning at this time is against every instinct in my being and something which I do not want to do. But I have been given no option following the statement that's been issued today," she added.

ICAC, an independent state-based public sector watchdog, said it was investigating whether there was conflict between the popular leader's public du-

ties and her undisclosed personal relationship with former government colleague Daryl Maguire.

The five-year relationship that has ended became public last year when Berejiklian gave evidence to an ICAC investigation into whether Maguire used his position as a lawmaker to gain an improper benefit for himself and his associates. He resigned from Parliament in 2018.

Berejiklian will be investigated over government grants awarded or promised to community groups in Maguire's electorate.

She said she had "always acted with the highest level of integrity."

Berejiklian said her only regret in resigning was not being able to finish the job of ensuring the state's transition from pandemic restrictions as vaccination

rates rise.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who is a member of Berejiklian's conservative Liberal Party, described her as a "person of the highest integrity."

"Gladys is a dear friend, we've known each other for a long time. She had displayed heroic qualities ... as the premier," Morrison said.

Berejiklian was a government minister in 2014 when then-Premier Barry O'Farrell resigned over an ICAC investigation into his failure to declare receiving a 3,000 Australian dollar (\$2,800) bottle of wine on a gift register.

Berejiklian's government colleagues will elect a new premier at a date to be announced. She would leave politics at a by-election which has yet to be called. □

'Anti-feminist' vandals in Israel deface images of women

JERUSALEM (AP) — The joyful glint in Peggy Parnass' eyes is so sharp it can be seen from the walls of Jerusalem's bustling Old City. Posted across the street at the gateway to City Hall, twin images of the Holocaust survivor and activist gaze out at the ancient warren of holy monuments of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

But just outside this center of spirituality, someone saw her image as a problem. Five times since the photos of Parnass were posted as part of an exhibition that began in April, vandals — widely believed to be ultra-Orthodox extremists — spray-painted over her eyes and mouth.

The graffiti was cleaned each time, leaving Parnass smiling again. For many Israelis, however, the short-term fix highlighted a familiar pattern that's all the more painful because the destruction is coming not from enemies across Israel's borders but from within.

"It's not anti-Semitic," said Jim Hollander, the curator of The Lonka Project art installation at Safra Square. "This is anti-feminist."

For all of its modernity, military firepower and high-tech know-how, Israel has for decades been unable to keep images of women from being defaced in some public spaces. Billboards showing women — including soccer players, musicians and young girls — have been repeatedly defaced and torn down by religious extremists in Jerusalem and other cities with large ultra-Orthodox populations over the past 20 years.

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel was erased from a 2015 photograph of world leaders in Paris published by an ultra-Orthodox newspaper.

The pattern is especially uncomfortable now.

"This is not Kabul, this is Jerusalem," said Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, a Jerusalem deputy mayor. "This is a concerted campaign by radicals to erase women from the public space, which belongs to all of us."



In this July 1, 2021, photo provided by the The Lonka Project, people look at the defaced portrait of Holocaust survivor Peggy Parnass, outside Jerusalem City Hall, where it is on display as part of an exhibit that tells the stories of 400 survivors of the Nazi atrocities during World War II in The Lonka Project exhibition in Safra Square in Jerusalem.

The double photo of 94-year-old Parnass, who lives in Germany, is posted on an outside wall of Jerusalem's City Hall complex. Hollander said he specifically chose it among dozens of others posted around the complex to hang in the marquee spot because it projects vitality, perseverance and survival across one of Israel's most famous expanses. Its central location makes it visible to thousands every day.

The vandalism is widely blamed on a small number of fringe members of the insular ultra-Orthodox community, which emphasizes modesty among women and has traditionally carried outsized influence in Israeli politics. The photo is posted next to a street that borders an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood and is a popular walkway to the Old City's Western Wall, the holiest Jewish prayer site.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews make up about 12.6% of Israel's population of 9.3 million. That community's population is growing faster than those of other Israeli Jews and Arabs, according to the Israel Democracy Institute, a nonpartisan Jerusalem think tank. A majority

of Jerusalem's Jewish community is ultra-Orthodox, the institute said.

There is a difference, one expert cautioned, between the more pragmatic mainstream ultra-Orthodox Judaism and the vandals defacing photos of women.

"In the mainstream, they know that the world outside is functioning in a different way," said Gilad Malach, who leads the ultra-Orthodox program at the Israel Democracy Institute. "And they know that in some situations, they need to cooperate with that."

In the mainstream Orthodox community, some women have begun to push back on social media. "The men aren't in charge there," said Kerry Bar-Cohn, 48, an Orthodox chiropractor and performer who a few years ago started posting YouTube videos of herself singing children's songs. Recently, she tried to publish an ad in a local circular with her photo on it, and was refused.

"It's straight-out discrimination," said Bar-Cohn, wife of a rabbi and a mother of four. "I was thinking I want to sue them, but No. 1, who has the time? And No. 2,

you don't want to be that person."

Advocates say erasing women carries dire societal risks.

"You don't see women, you don't hear their needs

and their needs are not met," said Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll, 46.

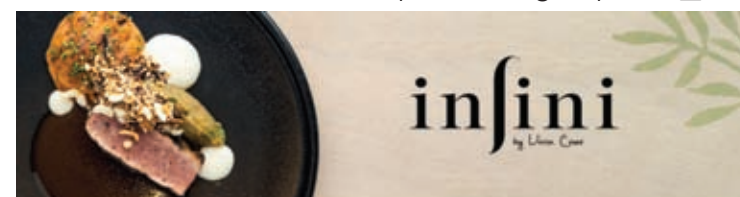
Keats Jaskoll recently launched the subscription-only Jewish Life Photo Bank, a collection of what she calls "positive" images of Orthodox women for the Chochmat Nashim organization. The idea is to sell images of women that are acceptable to an Orthodox audience and better understood by people in general.

None of these initiatives has halted the constant wave of vandalism.

The Israel Religious Action Center, which is connected to the liberal Reform movement of Judaism, has tracked the vandalism and other attacks on women's images for five years and filed a court petition to compel the city of Jerusalem to crack down.

Over time, the municipality has responded by saying it is engaged in "massive, effective and focused enforcement" of city bylaws against vandalism, but it acknowledged difficulty in collecting testimony and prosecuting suspects. □

Associated Press



Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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AHATA supports BRA's reinforcement plan for First Responders in a catastrophe

ORANJESTAD — Since 2016, Bureau Rampenbestrijding Aruba (BRA) has been implementing a REHAB Plan called "The Thirsty, The Hungry, and The Tired" to reinforce the team of First Responders during a catastrophe.

The goal of the plan is to improve Aruba's response capacity, so the island

recovers quicker after a catastrophe. In a conversation between BRA and Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association (AHATA), it was discovered that BRA would benefit from having a golf cart at their disposal to manage the crisis during a disaster. With a golf cart BRA can transport the response team and various relief items. AHATA went in

search of a golf cart within its membership base, and Divi Dutch Village/ Divi Village Golf & Beach Resort offered to restore and donate one of their golf carts to BRA.

With this gift, the First Responders will be well taken care of during a crisis and can effectively do their work. Divi and AHATA coor-



Pictured (from left to right): AHATA representative- Vanessa Rasmussen, Divi Pro Shop Manager- Yanel Olivero, Director of BRA- Rino Hermans, GM of Divi Dutch/Divi Village Golf & Beach Resort- Ferry Zievinger, BRA Representative- Rene Ridderstaat.

minated the official delivery of the refurbished golf cart to the Director of BRA, Mr. Rino Hermans. A big thank

you to Divi Dutch/Divi Village for their valuable gesture. □

Foundation "Ban uni man pa cria nos muchanan" needs a helping hand Feeding the needy children of Aruba every school day

ORANJESTAD — "Ban uni man pa cria nos muchanan" is a foundation whose goal it is to provide the needy children of Aruba with a breakfast every school day. A breakfast which consists of a sandwich and a drink (juice or milk). It is an independent foundation, receiving no subsidy whatsoever from the government.



The program started at the beginning of the 2001/2002 schoolyear as a community service project of the Facility Department of the Dr. Horacio E. Oduber Hospital, with 138 children. At the closing of the schoolyear 320 children were enrolled and this kept growing steadily each year. The 2019 schoolyear started with 650 children but as the schools reopened after the peak of the pandemic, the number of children grew to a staggering 794 children at the closing of the 2019-2020 schoolyear! These children are from 57 elementary schools all over the island. This number also includes about 70 children of the Tramerdia project,

which is an after school program. For over 20 years the foundation has been providing breakfast to children of elementary schools but they are aiming on some day also be able to provide kindergartens and high schools, seeing that there are many children in need.

The breakfast program is a sponsorship program; although the sponsors are encouraged to donate Fls 25.00 per month, the actual cost per child has doubled. Leaning towards Fls. 50.00 per month. Simple arithmetic shows that the current 450 sponsors are not enough. At Fls 50.00 per month it takes 800 sponsors

to keep the program running – or a combination of sponsors and donations. Due to the effect of the pandemic and the increase in consumption prices the foundation is expecting a big deficit for the

new school year of 2021-2022. If they don't manage to get sufficient funds they will have to reduce the amount of children to 600, meaning that at least 200 children won't be able to receive a breakfast this

year and they would have to make the difficult decision in choosing who will stay on the list and who to remove. The foundation will keep working hard and do their utmost on getting these funds but they need the help of the community.

If you feel inspired by this article, do not just turn the page but act upon it. You can help and support this wonderful foundation by making a donation to their bank account at the following banks: CMB 22559501, RBC 43.65.011 and at the Aruba Bank 2516290190.

For more information, or to receive a transcript of the Chamber of Commerce, the By-Laws or the latest Financial Report (2020-2021) of the foundation, please contact Mrs. Rachelle Roos at +297-527-4000 or Mrs. Felicia Halman at +297- 527-4750 or Mr. John Fun (President) at +297-527-4711 or at +297-699-4330.

Your support will help the children of this program at least have a breakfast every day. □



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Ewald Biemans of Bucuti & Tara to be honored at the United Nations Climate Conference 'COP26' in Glasgow, Scotland *Aruba will shine in the global spotlight*

EAGLE BEACH – More than 100 political world leaders, Queen Elizabeth and tens of thousands of negotiators, government representatives, businesses and citizens will be in attendance at COP26 for 12 days of climate discussions and negotiations, deemed the world's most significant summit to date on climate change.

Aruba in the Global Spotlight

Being the only hotel certified Carbon Neutral in the Caribbean, and with a replicable model believed to have the potential for significant impact due to the large number of hospitality businesses around the globe, the UN awarded the coveted Climate Action Award to Aruba's Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort in 2020. Ewald Biemans has therefore been invited to present his success to the conference attendees and will be honored during a ceremony on November 9th at COP26, Glasgow, UK.

What is COP26?

For nearly three decades the UN has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits – called COPs – which stands for 'Conference of the Parties'. In that time climate change has gone from being a lesser-known issue to a global priority. COP26 will take place from Oct. 31st – Nov. 12th in Glasgow, Scotland and is the United Nation's 26th conference on climate change.

Why is COP26 more critical than ever?

Leading climate scientists worldwide see evidence and have been warning that irreversible changes in Earth's climate systems are underway and have us in a state of planetary emergency. Global heating conditions with a global temperature rise of 9 degrees Fahrenheit, sea levels rising 20 to 30 feet would result in the complete loss of the world's coral reefs, the Amazon forest, and which will cause coastal areas such as the Eastern Seaboard, large portions of Asia and all Caribbean islands to be underwater, displacing millions of people who will become climate refugees as large parts of the planet will be uninhabitable. COP26 is in response to this global emergency to make a plan with a goal to limit warming to 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5



degrees Celsius).

How it began:

It has been 29 years since the world-famous 1992 United Nations Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit and Ewald Biemans, Owner/CEO of Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort is still as inspired as the day he heard the call to action given to the world at that conference. An avid news follower, Biemans read and watched all the coverage he could find as the pivotal 1992 gathering took place. Describing it as "a wake-up call," the conference accelerated his early efforts to what is now the Caribbean's most eco-awarded and first carbon-neutral hotel by 2018 and ultimately, a United Nations honoree. During the 1992 summit, scientists painted the picture of what our world would look like if we did not reduce our carbon emissions. Left unchecked, global warming would cause sea levels to rise to the point where Aruba may no longer have beaches. The science was clear and

Biemans began to search out and implement solutions.

Twenty-eight years later, Bucuti & Tara became the first hotel in United Nations' history to win the coveted Global UN 2020 Climate Action Award for Climate Neutral Now. This year, Biemans has been invited to attend as a speaker at UN's 26th annual climate change conference, Conference of the Parties, or COP26, November 1-12, 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland. Queen Elizabeth and over 100 political world leaders will be in attendance with COP26 deemed the world's most significant summit on climate change in the race to keep a temperature rise limit of 1.5 degrees within reach cited by the 2015 Paris Agreement with just nine years left before ecological consequences would be catastrophic and irreversible.

To learn more, visit Bucuti.com. □

A camera and a happy photographer



ORANJESTAD — The cover picture of the Aruba Today Facebook page shows a picture of a different local photographer every couple of months. We just love culture and would like to support our local talents, therefore Aruba Today chooses to be a platform for showcasing art.

The newest cover picture is the work of the local resident Michael Arends. Before him we had the honor to showcase the art of photographers Michael-Anthony, Anuar Habibe, Armando Goedgedrag, Jonathan Petit and Jeroen Lucas from Aruba Paradise Photos and Julien de Bats alias One Happy Photographer.

Michael Arends, born and raised in Aruba in the city of Savaneta, is a very lovely gentleman who has a great love for nature, culture and everything that is related to his beloved island of Aruba. As a good 'Savanetero' he enjoys swimming in the ocean. A while ago he encountered some health issues and in order to help him he decided to go for a swim every day. Amazed by the greatness and beauty that lies beneath the water he decided to take his camera with him and capture every moment while snorkeling. Photography has become his hobby. He uploads all his pictures on his facebook page, that way everyone is able to enjoy these beauties. He usually goes to Mangel Halto, tres trapi and many other areas where he takes extraordinary pictures. Michael also has a very special 'turtle' friend who loves taking pictures with him. Mr. Turtle just can't get enough of the camera.

Take a look at Michael's facebook page and feel free to chat with him. Facebook page: Michael Arends. □

Covid Test Center at Paseo has the best experience period!

PALM BEACH - Don't spend a single moment of your long awaited holiday in Aruba thinking about your return testing. The Covid Test Center Aruba located at the Paseo Herencia Mall is your travel ally. Just sit back and relax knowing that, when the time comes, their professional staff will make this process a breeze for you. No need to make an appointment or dread the nasal swab; you'll be done with it in a matter of minutes and back to fun stuff.

Some regions require proof or certification of negative COVID-19 status before allowing people into or out of the country. With rules and guidelines varying greatly from country to country, the safest approach is to have recent proof you are COVID-19 negative before you get to the airport. Covid Test Center @ Paseo provides both PCR and Antigen type testing with results within hours; and both are accepted by the CDC. Covid Test Center @ Paseo is con-



veniently located at the Paseo Herencia Mall in the heart of the Palm Beach Strip and right across from the Playa Linda and Holiday Inn hotels; only two doors from T.G.I. Friday's. We are open seven days a week, between 9 am and 9 pm. This gives you the choice to walk in when it better suits you. It can be at the start or at the end of your day. No appointment need-

ed here.

The friendly technicians at Covid Test Center @ Paseo will take your information as we are aware it is imperative that this shows accurately on the results. For a seamless process, please verify that you have provided the correct email to deliver the certificate. Said certificate can be printed at our offices should you wish to do so.

We understand that nobody enjoys doing a nasal swab. That is why we take pride in our reputation of being the gentlest swabbers on the island. First, we will not rush you just to go to the next in line. Through clear given instructions we want you to feel comfortable. When you are ready, we will promptly but tenderly take a proper sample. Many elsewhere traumatized people praise the difference it makes to test with us.

Forget about counting hours before your flight, our turnaround is fast! For travel to the US, for example, a day before will suffice. A great game plan is to test first, then



head out for an evening of dining, shopping and entertainment at the Paseo Herencia Mall, home of the water and lights show in the evenings. By the time you are back at the hotel, your results will be ready in your inbox.

A PCR test costs \$75 and results are ready the next day, while Antigen test costs \$35 with same day results. If you are staying at an off-high-rise area property, you can benefit from the free parking our customers receive at the mall lot.).

For more information follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. □

EXPLAINER: Why coffee could cost more at groceries, cafes

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) —

As if a cup of coffee wasn't expensive enough, a confluence of factors is driving up farmers' costs to grow the beans and it could begin filtering down to your local cafe before the end of the year.

After hovering for years near \$1 per pound, coffee futures — the price large-volume buyers agree to pay for coffee upon delivery months down the road — doubled in late July, reaching heights not seen since 2014. Though prices have eased a bit, they remain elevated at about \$1.90 per pound.

Coffee lovers already paying \$8 or more for a bag in the supermarket or up to \$5 for a cup may despair over even-higher prices, but a spike in coffee prices on the international futures market doesn't always trickle down to the consumer.

Here's a look at some factors that could determine whether Americans will be paying more for their morning jolt in the near future.

WHAT HAPPENED?

A sustained drought followed by two July frosts blew a hole in Brazil's coffee output, immediately sending wholesale prices for the popular Arabica bean to more than \$2 per pound. The frost will significantly affect the 2022-23 harvest, said Carlos Mera, who analyzes the coffee



Chris Vigilante refills a coffee grinder with coffee beans at Vigilante Coffee, Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2021, in College Park, Md.

markets at Rabobank.

The Brazil frosts followed COVID-related supply chain snarls, a dearth of shipping containers, labor shortages and other production hiccups. Add in rising costs for virtually everything and you have a bitter cup brewing for coffee drinkers.

"This is unprecedented," said Alexis Rubinstein, the managing editor of Coffee & Cocoa for commodities brokerage StoneX Group. "It's never been this perfect storm before. It's usually just been a supply-and-de-

mand scenario.

"We've never been dealing with a supply and demand issue on top of a logistics issue, on top of labor issues, on top of a global pandemic."

WHY MIGHT RETAIL PRICES RISE?

While it's difficult to determine the size of the crop loss in Brazil, Mera said estimates vary between 2 million and 6 million fewer bags of coffee. That's about 12% of the output from the world's largest producer of Arabica, the bean used for most coffee

sold around the world. Lower supplies almost always mean higher prices.

Grace Wood, an industry analyst for market research firm IBISWorld, said if consumers don't see coffee prices rise by the end of this year, they almost certainly will in 2022, as per capita demand is expected to increase.

"That is just going to contribute to more demand that is going to further disrupt operations and make it more difficult for operators who are already experiencing supply issues," Wood said.

Mera said people who buy coffee beans in the grocery store will likely see a more noticeable increase in prices because about half the cost of that bag on the shelf comes solely from the bean itself. However, in large coffee shops, he added, the cost of the bean only represents about 5% of your cup of hot coffee, so roasters "may not need to carry over the increases right away."

IS IT A CERTAINTY THAT RETAIL PRICES WILL RISE?

It seems likely, although higher coffee prices on the international future market is not a guarantee that prices at your favorite roaster will go up. The damaged crop in Brazil is still more than a year from harvest, plenty of time for many factors to reverse course.

Rubinstein said higher prices on the international market can often stimulate production farmers will have more money to invest in their crop and if there's more coffee on the market, prices will retreat. But that will also depend on whether the big roasters have enough beans hoarded to get them through however long prices remain elevated.

Starbucks, the world's biggest coffee retailer, suggested that it won't need to raise its prices because of Brazil's lower output. □

Workers at Bezos' rocket company allege sexism, safety risks

A group of more than 20 current and former employees are accusing Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin rocket ship company of being a toxic work environment and not adhering to proper safety protocols.

The workers claim in an essay that there's sexism at the Kent, Washington, company. The employees, led by former head of Blue Origin employee communications Alexandra Abrams, state that "numerous senior leaders have been known to be consistently inappropriate with women." They also

claim that many company leaders were "unapproachable" and showed clear bias against women. There were also safety concerns, with the group stating that Blue Origin seemed more focused on beating billionaires Richard Branson and Elon Musk to space rather than tackling safety issues that would have slowed down the schedule.

Bezos blasted into space on July 21 on the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, a date he selected for its historical significance. Bezos held

fast to it, even as Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson pushed up his own flight from New Mexico and beat him to space by nine days. The group said that last year company leaders seemed impatient with New Shepard rocket's schedule of a few flights per year, instead wanting more than 40. "Some of us felt that with the resources and staff available, leadership's race to launch at such a breakneck speed was seriously compromising flight safety," they said. Blue Origin said in a statement that it has no toler-



In this July 20, 2021 file photo, Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon and space tourism company Blue Origin, participates in post launch briefing from its spaceport near Van Horn, Texas.

Associated Press

ance for any kind of harassment or discrimination and that it stands by its safety record. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

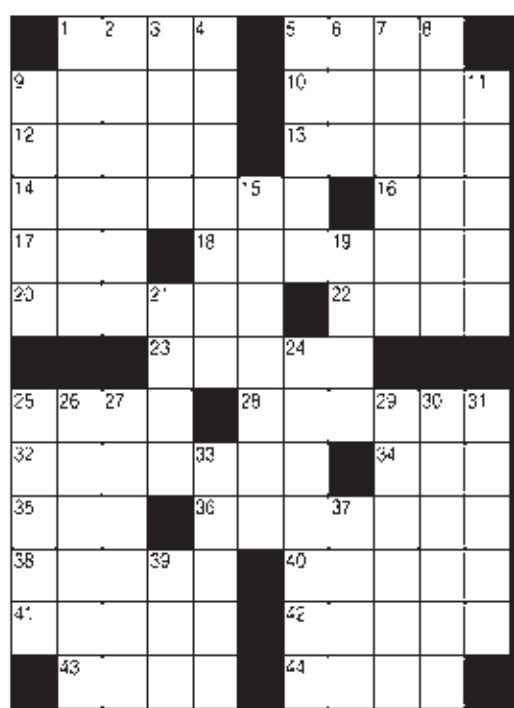
- ACROSS**
- 41 Became en-hero-trenched
 - 5 Niger neighbor swords
 - 9 Poultry buy contents
 - 10 Whoop it up
 - 12 Tony, for one
 - 13 Make blank
 - 14 Regions
 - 16 Michele of "Glee"
 - 17 Fire proof
 - 18 Parish leaders
 - 20 Takes the wheel
 - 22 Player's fee
 - 23 Channing of "Magic Mike"
 - 25 Seoul setting
 - 28 New York tribe
 - 32 Browbeats
 - 34 Tear
 - 35 Merino mom
 - 36 Plane headings
 - 38 Jim Croce's "I Got —"
 - 40 Mountain group

DOWN

- 1 Most chilly
- 2 Cochise's people
- 3 Humorist Sahl
- 4 Neighbor of Spain
- 5 Musical opposite of dimin.
- 6 That woman
- 7 Arthurian island
- 8 Dry expanse
- 9 Hacienda houses
- 11 Tenant's form
- 15 Make good as new
- 19 Unexciting
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- 24 Tum loose, say
- 25 In the future
- 26 Assured
- 27 Pleis-tocene period
- 29 Pressed
- 30 Sad songs
- 31 Church parts
- 33 Pizzeria sights
- 37 Race goal
- 39 Hamm of soccer



Yesterday's answer



A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

10-2

CRYPTOQUOTE

CGZ OEPVT GBA BNGKZQZT
YPKVKB MNZ OKCGEDC OKATEJ.
SEOZP OKCGEDC NEMANKZMNZ.
EDPA KA B OEPVT ER MDNVZBP
L K B M C A B M T Z C G K N B V

KMRBMCA. — LZM. EJPB YPBTVZX
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT'S EASY TO HAVE PRINCIPLES WHEN YOU'RE RICH. THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO HAVE PRINCIPLES WHEN YOU'RE POOR. — RAY A. KROC

Past storms haven't fazed Facebook. Instagram Kids might



This Aug. 23, 2019, file photo, shows the Instagram app icon on the screen of a mobile device in New York.

Associated Press

By AMANDA SEITZ and BARBARA ORTUTAY

Associated Press

Nineteen-year-old Gigi Painter hopes Facebook's planned "Instagram Kids" never becomes a reality. Growing up in a small Ohio town, Painter said she and most of her friends created Instagram accounts by lying about their ages years before they turned 13.

She recalls constant pressure to post good photos that would garner lots of "likes" or positive comments. And then there was the ever-present threat of bullying on the platform. Some people at her school would create anonymous Instagram accounts where they'd upload photos of other students with mean or sexualized captions.

She isn't alone. An unlikely alliance of congressional Democrats and Republicans, along with a host of child development experts and online advocacy groups, is now pressuring Facebook to scuttle Instagram Kids, a proposed service for tweens. Their reasoning could be summarized this way: A company that cannot keep human trafficking, hate speech and the live-streaming of suicides off its platform should not be trusted with making an app for children.

"This is serious," said Painter, who can rattle off all the social media accounts she has on her phone. "People are basing their whole view of themselves off of the

feedback they get from a picture."

Instagram, a small but beloved photo sharing app when Facebook bought it for \$1 billion in 2012, is having its Facebook moment. It's not an enviable one. Damning newspaper reports based on the company's own research found that Facebook knew about the harms Instagram can cause to teenagers especially teen girls when it comes to mental health and body image issues. In a swift PR offensive, Facebook tried to play down the reports including its own research. It didn't work.

On Thursday, senators one from each side of the aisle called the first of several hearings on the subject. Antigone Davis, Facebook's head of global safety, defended Instagram's efforts to protect young people using its platform, insisting that Facebook cares "deeply about the safety and security of the people on our platform."

The Senate Commerce Subcommittee is examining how Facebook handled information from its own researchers on Instagram's potential threat to younger users while the company publicly played down the issue.

The episode threatens to rival the scale of Facebook's 2018 Cambridge Analytica debacle.

Revelations at the time showed that the data mining firm had gathered details on as many as 87 mil-

lion Facebook users without their permission, eventually leading to congressional hearings in which Facebook CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg testified for the first time.

But the Cambridge Analytica scandal was complicated and hard to follow. During those hearings, some lawmakers didn't seem to have even a basic understanding on how social media works.

Thursday's hearing showed that they've done some homework. The fallout could put an end to the tech company's plan for a children's product and might even spur lawmakers to regulate the company, if only they can agree on how.

"It's abundantly clear that Facebook views the events of the last two weeks purely as a PR problem," said Josh Golin, executive director of the children's online watchdog group Fairplay. The group, formerly known as the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, doesn't take money from Facebook or other corporations, unlike the nonprofits Facebook tends to bring in for expert advice on its products. □

There is a good side to children's use of the internet, said Dr. Nusheen Ameenuddin, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Council on Communications and Media. It can be a great place for kids to talk with friends during a pandemic lockdown, explore a museum virtually or even make money as budding influencers.

But some of her pediatric patients have endured harassment or spend too much time scrolling through an endless stream of photos on apps like Instagram. That's why she and other pediatricians want Facebook to do a better job of making sure young kids don't find their way onto sites like Instagram. And they want legislators to pass regulations on how tech companies can advertise to kids. □

Brazil's Amazon records least September fires in 20 years

By DAVID BILLER
Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The number of fires in Brazil's Amazon during September dropped to the lowest for the month in two decades, according to data from the Brazilian National Institute for Space Research.

September is historically Brazil's worst month for forest fires and, while the data is positive, environmental experts question whether the trend will be confirmed by coming months.

The number of Amazon fires was just over half the level recorded in September last year, according to the data. That helped push down the nationwide total, along with a sharp drop in the amount of fires in the Pantanal wetlands. Fires in September retreated to the lowest number for the month since 2018, several months before President Jair Bolsonaro took office.

Since taking office, Bolsonaro has encouraged development within the Amazon and dismissed global complaints about its destruction as a plot to hold back the nation's agribusiness. His administration also weakened environmental authorities and backed legislative measures to loosen land protections, emboldening land grabbers.

More recently, he has sought to demonstrate heightened environmental commitment in the face of criticism from the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden and troubled institutional investors. At the United Nations this month, he credited his administration's redoubled efforts for the plunge of Amazon deforestation alerts in August, which followed a year-on-

year decline in July. September results will be released in the coming week. Environmentalists roundly dismiss his shift as disingenuous and say his deployment of the military to the Amazon is ineffective for preservation; an Associated Press investigation last year found the same results.

Márcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate Observatory, a network of environmental nonprofit groups, welcomed September fire data, but said he would need to see lower figures through at least year-end before declaring it a trend, particularly given still-elevated deforestation levels and limited enforcement.

"As government action in the Amazon is very weak, even with these variations, it's hard to say it will be maintained. Why would it be maintained?" Astrini said. "The government isn't there, there's no repression. So it depends on the will of the people who are deforesting, setting fires."

Severe drought and early data at the start of the forest fire season had raised widespread concern that this year's blazes would reach the same destruction recorded in the past two years.

But rainfall in the Amazon during August was significantly above average. That was the main inhibi-



In this Sept. 14, 2020 file photo, an egret flies over a bank of caiman on the banks of the almost dried up Bento Gomes river, in the Pantanal wetlands near Pocone, Mato Grosso state, Brazil.

Associated Press

tor keeping ranchers from setting fire to felled trees in September, which seemed "almost divine intervention," said Ane Alencar, science director at the Amazon Environmental Research Institute.

By contrast in the Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetlands, there has been a shift in behavior from last year leading to far fewer fires, despite the ongoing drought that has rendered the area a powder keg, Alencar added. Fires are down by more than two-thirds in the first nine months of 2020 after last year's explosion brought ruin to the local tourism industry.

"The disaster of last year served to help people bet-

ter organize firefighting and prevention this year," Alencar said. "The economic losses last year had an important impact in making people think more about their actions and, with peer enforcement, reduce the use of fire."



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San Nicolas

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del Pueblo Tel. 582 1253

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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
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Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
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Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

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Craig's Bond exits in big, brash 'No Time to Die'

By JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

Welcome back, Mr. Bond. This is your most important mission yet. The fate of the movie business depends on your success.

That's how it feels, anyway, so high are industry expectations around "No Time to Die." The 25th James Bond adventure is finally hitting screens a year and a half after its originally scheduled April 2020 release date, and is central to Hollywood's hopes of luring pandemic-weary audiences back into movie theaters.

Moviegoers certainly get a lot of Bond for their buck in Daniel Craig's fifth and final adventure as the suave but by now battered secret agent. At 2 hours, 43 minutes, it's the series' longest film yet. Big, brash, explosive and occasionally even tender, the movie nods fondly to the spy series' past while moving — somewhat — into a more diverse, less male-dominated and Euro-centric era.

And it definitely provides a respite from weary reality. The coronavirus does not trouble James Bond's world in "No Time to Die." Much else does, though, from terrifying bioweapons to family legacies of violence.



This image released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer Pictures shows Daniel Craig in a scene from "No Time To Die."

Directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, the first American entrusted with this treasured British export, the film opens with two sequences strikingly different in tone. The first is a chilly Scandinavian horror vignette, beautifully shot by cinematographer Linus Sandgren, that introduces themes of imperiled children and poisoned inheritances that will ripple through the film.

The second sequence offers one of those brief idylls

Bond is occasionally allowed. Bond is retired from the world of spycraft and relaxing in Italian splendor with Madeleine Swann (Lea Seydoux). Soon, though, the strains of Billie Eilish's theme song swell over the opening credits, and Bond is back on more familiar and hazardous terrain.

All is not well in the world. There are strains in the U.K.-U.S. spying relationship, and a deadly feud among international evildoers.

Bond's old nemesis Spectre and a rival crew are fighting for control of Heracles, a DNA-targeting biological weapon that could wipe out humanity. (A potential killer inside us: Maybe the real world is not so far away after all.)

From there on, it's a protracted but pacey thriller with a plot that twists like a double helix. All Bond films are made from essentially the same ingredients; what sets them apart is the

chemistry of their combination. "No Time to Die" has all the required elements: gorgeous locales, from Cuba to Norway to a chilly, handsome London. There are gorgeous cars, including, of course, a supercharged classic Aston Martin. There's cool and faintly ridiculous technology: Nanobots and a bionic eye both feature prominently.

Screenwriters Fukunaga, Neal Purvis, Robert Wade and Phoebe Waller-Bridge — some moments of left-field humor seem to bear the "Fleabag" creator's stamp — satisfyingly tweak the recipe.

Female characters who are there to kick ass rather than tempt Bond include Ana de Armas' unflappable CIA agent Paloma and Lashana Lynch's Nomi, a Black double-O spy who has no time for Bond's patriarchal platitudes. There's a respectful but playful sense of the series' six-decade past. Craig delivers some of the mandatory lines — "Bond. James Bond" — with a touch of Roger Moore's raised eyebrow. Bad guys speak Russian. Rami Malek's facially scarred villain, Lyutsifer Safin, prowls a brutalist bunker lair that Dr. No would be proud of. □

Associated Press

Pat Robertson steps down as host of long-running '700 Club'



In this Feb. 24, 2016 file photo, Rev. Pat Robertson listens as Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va.

Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Pat Robertson, who turned a tiny Virginia television station into a global religious broadcasting network, is stepping down after a half-century running the "700 Club" on daily TV, the Chris-

tian Broadcasting Network announced on Friday. Robertson, 91, said in a statement that he hosted the network's flagship program for the last time on Friday, and that his son Gordon Robertson will take

over the weekday show starting on Monday.

"I will no longer be the host of the '700 Club' after, I think, 54 years of hosting the program," Robertson said on the show on Friday, although he vowed to return from time to time, if he's had a "revelation" he needs to share. "I thank God for everyone that's been involved. And I want to thank all of you."

Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network started airing on Oct. 1, 1961 after he bought a bankrupt UHF television station in Portsmouth, Virginia. The "700 Club" began production in 1966.

Now based in Virginia Beach, CBN says its outreach extends to more than 100 countries and terri-

tories in dozens of languages through TV and video evangelism, online ministry and prayer centers. The "700 Club" talk show can be seen in the vast majority of U.S. television markets.

Robertson, who ran for president in 1988, also founded the Christian Coalition, galvanizing American evangelicals into a conservative political force.

As "700 Club" host, Robertson sometimes found himself in hot water for his on-air pronouncements. In 2005, he called for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and warned residents of a rural Pennsylvania town not to be surprised if disaster struck them because they voted out school board members who favored

teaching "intelligent design."

But Robertson also called for ending mandatory prison sentences for marijuana possession convictions. He later said on "The 700 Club" that marijuana should be legalized and treated like alcohol because the government's war on drugs had failed.

In December 2007, Robertson's son, Gordon, succeeded him as chief executive of CBN. Robertson remained chairman of the network and continued to appear on "The 700 Club." Robertson will still appear on a monthly, interactive episode of The 700 Club and will come on the program "occasionally as news warrants," the network said. □

Rays' sister-city plan a really, really dumb idea

By PAUL NEWBERRY

There have been plenty of hair-brained ideas down through the years.

New Coke. Hair in a Can. The Godfather Part III. Auto-Tune. The Ford Pinto.

Well, it's time to add another one to the Hall of Shame: The Tampa Bay Rays' non-sensical scheme to play half their home games in one city, the other half in another city some 1,500 miles away.

In two different countries, for that matter.

Strangely, a franchise that does pretty much everything right on the field — the low-budget team made it to the World Series last season and is heading back to the playoffs with the best record in the American League — keeps messing things up away from the diamond.

Plagued by dismal attendance despite their success, the Rays have been trying for years to come up with a replacement for Tropicana Field, a monstrosity of a domed stadium located in sleepy St. Petersburg, far away from much of their potential fan base. Having been thwarted at every turn, the Rays came up with a plan that you'd swear was a joke if they didn't keep saying it with a straight face.

Taking a page from the old Kansas City-Omaha Kings — look it up, kids — the Rays are pushing to play spring training and roughly the first half of the season in Tampa, then shift north to Montreal to play the rest of their home games.

Oh, Canada, what are they thinking?

Atlanta Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman gave an incredulous look when asked about Tampa Bay's so-called "Sister City" proposition.

"Having two homes, people with families, people with kids in school, I think that's quite a bit to ask," Freeman said. "There's no other way to put it. That would be a lot."

Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts expressed a similar sentiment. "The season is hard enough



Tampa Bay Rays' Brett Phillips, left, is tagged out at home plate by Houston Astros catcher Jason Castro while trying to stretch a triple into a home run during the eighth inning of a baseball game Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021, in Houston.

Associated Press

as it is," he said. "If that's what the Rays think is the best for them, then that's great, but it's certainly something that is not ideal." Let's see if we can grasp what the Rays are supposedly hoping to do by the time their Tropicana Field lease runs out in 2027, if not sooner.

Clearly, this boondoggle hinges on the Rays somehow persuading both cities to build new open-air stadiums, which they presume will be more viable economically since neither locale has shown much interest in subsidizing a domed or retractable-roof facility that would be optimal for a full season in either spot.

The Rays would hold spring training on the Gulf Coast and the first part of the season in Tampa. Then, just as the stifling Florida heat is really setting in and Montreal has finally thawed out from winter, the Rays would shift north to play the remainder of the regular season, hopefully completing their home schedule before the thermometer plunges again. Of course, if the Rays made the playoffs, they would either have to play outdoors in Montreal in October — not ideal, to say the least — or shift back to Tampa — better weather,

but a jarring change heading into the postseason.

San Francisco pitcher Kevin Gausman pointed to more practical concerns, which would surely raise the ire of the powerful players association.

"You think about taxes, too," he said. "You're playing in Florida, where there's no state income tax, and all of a sudden you're playing in Montreal? I don't know what the taxes are there, but it's probably pretty high."

And what to call such a team?

The Rays nickname does not work in Montreal, which is eager to bring back the beloved Expos moniker from its previous big league team. Maybe they could borrow a page the NFL in its fledgling days.

Struggling to stay afloat during World War II, the Philadelphia Eagles and Pittsburgh Steelers merged for the 1943 season, played home games in both cities, and became known as the "Steagles."

Anyone up for the Exrays? The Steagles, of course, were merely a temporary solution to deal with extraordinary circumstances, not unlike more recent two-city adaptations.

— In 2005, the NFL's New Or-

leans Saints split their home games between San Antonio and Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Big Easy.

— The NBA's Toronto Raptors spent last season in Florida due to COVID-19 restrictions.

— This season, baseball's Toronto Blue Jays actually played in three different home stadiums because of the pandemic, starting out at their spring training facility in Dunedin, Florida, before moving north to Buffalo for about two dozen home games and and finally back to Toronto at the end of July.

"Extremely difficult," Roberts marveled. "I give (Toronto manager) Charlie Montoya and the Blue Jays a lot of credit for what they've had to go through this year."

There have been attempts to play in multiple home cities, though nothing on the scale that Tampa Bay is proposing.

In the old American Basketball League, for instance, several teams tried a regionalized approach within a single state. The Carolina Cougars held home games in Greensboro, Charlotte, Raleigh and Winston-Salem. The Floridians played in Miami, Tampa, Jacksonville and West Palm Beach.

Most notable were the Kansas City-Omaha Kings, who considered both cities home during their first three seasons in the NBA. Admittedly, they are much closer to each other than Tampa Bay and Montreal — about 185 miles — which made it more feasible to play 26 home games in Kansas City and 15 in Omaha.

Even then, the unique arrangement didn't last. The Kings dropped Omaha from their name after three seasons, eventually shifted all home games to Kansas City and wound up moving to Sacramento in 1985.

Clearly, two-city teams do not work long term. But the Rays keep insisting that it's the only way for baseball to survive in the Tampa Bay area — even if it's only for a half-season a year.

The Rays were going to put up a sign at Tropicana Field touting the Sister City plan during the playoffs, only to change course when they were rightfully called out for angering what few fans they have and causing an unnecessary distraction for their players.

"I made a big mistake, a real mistake," Rays owner Stuart Sternberg said this week in an interview with the team's radio network. "I absolutely should have known better. And really, I'm sorry for that. I'm here to tell you and tell the fans that the sign is not going to go up." Now, he needs to take an even bigger step. Call the sister-city plan what it is.

A really, really dumb idea. □

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